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THE IDEAL MINISTER OF THE TALMUD.

Talmud Babli, Taanith, Mishnah, 15a, Gemara 16a and b.

INTRODUCTION.

MISHNAH.—What is the order of service for the [seven]¹ fasts?

They brought the Ark [containing the Scrolls of the Law] into an open place of the city and sprinkled ashes upon it, and upon the head of the Prince, and upon the head of the Chief of the Beth Din, and every man placed ashes upon his own head. An Elder said before them words of great solemnity: — “Our brethren, it is not said of the men of Nineveh, ‘And God saw their sackcloth and their fasting’; but, ‘And God saw their works that they turned from their evil way’; and in Holy Writ it is said, ‘Rend your hearts and not your garments.’”

They stood in prayer, and brought before the Ark an Elder who was qualified, and who had children, and whose house was free from transgression, so that his heart should be perfect in prayer, and he said before them twenty-four blessings—the eighteen blessings of the Amedah, and added six thereto; and these are they:—

זכרונות שופרות

“In my distress I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me”;

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills . . .”;

“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord”;

“A prayer of the afflicted when he is overwhelmed.”

¹ These seven fasts were appointed by the Sanhedrin to follow a series of six in the event of the continuance of the drought in Palestine.

Rabbi Judah says he need not say זכרונות and שופרות ; but he could say in their place :—

“ If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence ” ;

“ The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah concerning the dearth.”

And he completed them in the following manner :—

For the first he said :—“ He who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah, may he answer you, and listen to the voice of your cry this day. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who redeemest Israel.”

For the second he said :—“ He who answered our fathers by the Red Sea, may he answer you, and listen to the voice of your cry this day. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who rememberest forgotten things.”

For the third he said :—“ He who answered Joshua in Gilgal, may he answer you, and listen to the voice of your cry this day. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who hearest the trumpet-blast.”

For the fourth he said :—“ He who answered Samuel in Mizpah, may he answer you, and listen to the voice of your cry this day. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who hearest cries.”

For the fifth he said :—“ He who answered Elijah on Mount Carmel, may he answer you, and listen to the voice of your cry this day. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who hearest prayer.”

For the sixth he said :—“ He who answered Jonah from the whale, may he answer you, and listen to the voice of your cry this day. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who answerest in the time of sorrow.”

For the seventh¹ he said :—“ He who answered David, and Solomon, his son, in Jerusalem, may he answer you, and listen to the voice of your cry this day. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who hast compassion upon the earth ” . . .

GEMARA.— . . . The Rabbis have learnt :—“ They

¹ The introduction of the “ seventh ” is explained in the Gemara.

stood in prayer." Even if he were an Elder, and a man of learning, they did not appoint him unless he was qualified. Who was qualified ?

THE IDEAL MINISTER

(Suggested by the reply of the Gemara).

Behold him humble and with nought of wealth,
Except the righteousness within his soul
And knowledge which adorns his noble mind,
More precious than the riches of the earth.
Gentle and meek and lowly in his ways,
Knowing his wisdom comes not from himself.
Labour despising not nor scorning toil,
The curse of labour to a blessing turns.
And he hath children, fashioning his heart
Unto the feelings of a father's love,
So that with fervour and with earnestness
He prayeth for the sons of other men ;
And unto all he is compassionate
As hath a father pity on his son.
Closed are his portals to unrighteousness,
Guilt findeth not a place beneath his roof,
His fame is perfect and his name unstained,
From youth through life's career unknown to sin.
Unto the people ever welcome he,
For there dwells that in him which lures the heart,
A perfect and a wondrous sympathy,
Embracing all their sorrows and their joys ;
Breathing the word of comfort in their woe,
Rejoicing in the welfare of their lives.
What can surpass the sweetness of his voice,
Revealing all the beauty of his soul ;

Unto his heedful hearers, gathered round,
Intoning solemn words of holiness.
Enthralled they listen when he reads the Law ;
The sacred words sink deep in every heart,
And leave an impress of authority,
Holding them there with true and mighty force.
They hear from him the Prophet's holy words,
The thunder of their warning and reproach,
The bitter lamentation for their sin,
The pleadings and the promises of good ;
And in the sound outpouring from his lips,
They seem to hear the Prophet's voice again.
And when he reads the books of Holy Writ,
Telling of glory which hath passed away,
His throbbing heart wells forth in song so sweet,
It seems an echo of the voice Divine,
Inspiring them with hope that yet once more
The glory will return which hath been theirs.
His lips are steeped in wisdom handed down
In golden links unbroke from sire to son,
Long treasured race-traditions old and dear,
To be preserv'd through ages yet unborn.
Speaking in glowing words of metaphor,
He shows the beauty of their ancient faith.
His prayers mount up like incense from the shrine,
And bear a people's anguish to the Throne.
And when he stands before the sacred Ark,
A thousand prayers unite and rise as one.
This is the chosen Minister of God,
To lead his people in the righteous way ;
Yet not alone a picture of the mind,
A dream of what a minister must be,
Behold the Rabbis in their wisdom gazed
On Rabbi Iscah, Immi's noble son.

NINA DAVIS.